



Science Advisory Committee

DATE: 11/27/02

TO: Leon County Board of County Commissioners

FROM: Leon County Science Advisory Committee

RE: Recommendation from Leon County Science Advisory Committee to the Leon County Board of County Commissioners Regarding the Environmental Impact of Road Alterations in the Apalachicola National Forest within Leon County

Under current policy, and by agreement with the Apalachicola National Forest Staff, most road maintenance improvements in the Forest are done by the Leon County Department of Public Works. Typically, such maintenance improvements are made without any environmental impact analysis since the Apalachicola National Forest is exempt from the environmental impact process for maintenance activities. The Leon County Science Advisory Committee believes this policy needs to be changed. The Science Advisory Committee is particularly concerned about the impact on unique plants, animals, and temporary ponds when clays, chemicals, hard surfaces, increased traffic volumes, and higher vehicle speeds are added to the Forest's sensitive "sand hill" environment.

The Committee's view, which seemed to be generally acceptable to the Public Works Department and Apalachicola National Forest personnel who attended a meeting (July 3, 2002) on the subject, is that such improvements or alterations need more careful review. In some cases, alterations to the Forest's wilderness roads should not be made. In some cases, road improvements should be confined only to the more populated areas of the Forest, or to those brief stretches where the roads sometimes become impassible. These roads are usually narrow sand roads that are where they are by tradition and not by design analysis. In some cases, the roads should be relocated slightly. The future of the striped newt, gopher tortoise and similar woodland creatures may not be as important as the future of man, but their future still matters. It is possible to preserve that future in the unique environment of the Apalachicola National Forest without serious compromise to the objectives of appropriate forest management, and the reasonable needs and desires of other forest users. This should be done.

We are pleased that the Public Works Department and the Forest Service have agreed to work together to minimize any environmental impacts from future road alterations in the National Forest. The consensus at our meeting on July 3, 2002, was that Public Works would proceed with Open Graded Cold Mix (OGCM) Asphalt Stabilization on the eastern 1+ miles of L. L. Wallace Road and maintain the western 3+ miles without further stabilization efforts, and that all other roads in the National Forest would be subjected to an environmental analysis prior to conducting any alterations.

We, therefore, recommend that the Board of County Commissioners adopt an official position that alterations which change the existing character of roads in the Apalachicola National Forest within Leon County, should not be undertaken until an appropriate environmental impact analysis has been completed, and that this position be formally transmitted to the appropriate staff in Public Works and U. S. Forest Service personnel.

The Science Advisory Committee is ready to provide further input to the Board of County Commissioners on this issue, and to recommend a liaison person to work with Forest Service and/or Department of Public Works personnel.